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# The Longitudinal Effect of Information Seeking on Socialisation and Development in Three Organisations: Filling the Research Gaps

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## Abstract

In this study, we have examined the longitudinal effect of various sources and strategies of information seeking by newcomers on organisational knowledge and commitment. Respondents were junior managers, rank-and-file employees, and IT professionals from three organisations in the Netherlands (total number of respondents  $N = 207$ ). They completed two written questionnaires, after having been in employment for two and ten months respectively. Results showed significant differences in the information seeking and socialisation of the newcomers from the three organisations. The junior managers from the postal and telecom organisation more often turned to supervisors with questions, and the IT professionals observed less and asked fewer questions of their co-workers and more of support staff. The IT professionals scored lowest on all socialisation outcomes and their affective commitment decreased over time. Surprisingly, we found that observing and written material were most strongly related to organisational knowledge and commitment. The study concludes with a discussion of the results and implications for future research and organisational practice.

## Introduction

Several studies have shown that newcomers integrate and develop in organisations by actively seeking information (Chao, O'Leary-Kelley, Wolf, Klein and Gardner, 1994; Louis, 1990; Miller and Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993a, 1993b, 1995; Mullen, 1999; Ostroff and Kozlowski, 1992; Wanous and Colella, 1989). These studies show

that newcomers employ various strategies and various sources in gathering information. The studies also show that the frequency of information seeking is related to socialisation outcomes such as organisational commitment. However, there are some important gaps in the current knowledge on the influence of information seeking on socialisation, which the present study seeks to address.

## The Use of Various Strategies and Sources in Information Seeking

Several studies have shown that newcomers in organisations use various strategies for information acquisition (Ashford and Cummings, 1983; Callister, Kramer and Turban, 1999; Miller and Jablin, 1991; Morand, 2000; Morrison, 1993a, 1993b, 1995; Ostroff and Kozlowski, 1992; 1993). The following three strategies are frequently distinguished: 1) *monitoring*, i.e. observing by seeking signals that can be derived from an event, the behaviour of others, or both; 2) *inquiring*, i.e. overtly and directly asking people for information; and 3) *consulting written material*, i.e. reading memos, annual reports, or company magazines to acquire information. Research findings indicate that, as a rule, individuals more often observe other people than ask them questions (Ashford, 1986; Morrison, 1993a, 1993b). However, these studies only compared the overall frequencies of using the two strategies of observing and asking questions; and did not distinguish between the various targets such as supervisors, co-workers, other newcomers, support staff, and organisational outsiders such as clients, family, and friends. We would argue

that this is an important issue, and hence, in the present study, we have investigated this further. We would expect that, as a rule, newcomers more often ask questions directly to supervisors and experienced co-workers to gain information than they would observe them, because it gives the most accurate information. Conversely, we hypothesise that newcomers will more often observe than question in seeking information from other newcomers, support staff, and from people outside the organisation such as clients, family, and friends.

*Hypothesis 1a:* Newcomers more often ask questions directly to supervisors to gain information than they would observe them.

*Hypothesis 1b:* Newcomers more often ask questions directly to experienced co-workers to gain information than they would observe them.

*Hypothesis 1c:* Newcomers more often observe than question in seeking information from other newcomers.

*Hypothesis 1d:* Newcomers more often observe than question in seeking information from support staff.

*Hypothesis 1e:* Newcomers more often observe than question in seeking information from people outside the organisation such as clients, family, and friends.

## Changes in Sources and Strategies for Information Seeking over Time

An important aspect of a newcomer's socialisation process is that the use of the sources and strategies for information seeking may change over time. Morrison's contrary finding (1993), that the use of strategies was fairly stable

over time, may be caused by the fact that she did not distinguish between the various information sources. A combination of an increase in using some sources and a decrease in using others may have led to the apparent lack of overall change. To resolve this issue, we therefore examined the changes in the various sources and strategies of information seeking over time. In line with Ashford (1986), who asserted that greater so-called social costs are associated with information seeking as tenure increases, we would expect to see, over time, an increase in the non-personal strategies of observing and studying written material, and a decrease in seeking information directly from personal sources. Specifically, we hypothesise that:

*Hypothesis 2a:* Over time the use of observing and consulting written material increases. *Hypothesis 2b:* Over time the use of consulting written material increases.

*Hypothesis 2c:* Over time the use of asking supervisors for information decreases.

*Hypothesis 2d:* Over time the use of asking co-workers for information decreases.

### Differences in Information Seeking between Situations

Another gap in the earlier research is that most previous studies on information seeking are based on samples of business school or university alumni who are generally occupying *managerial* positions (e.g., Morrison, 1993a, 1993b; Saks and Ashforth, 1997). However, other groups of employees, and/or other types of organisation, may use different sources and strategies in information seeking and this may have consequences for the way in which and the degree to which they integrate in the organisation and their career developments (cf. Cable and Parsons, 2001; Finkelstein, Kulas and Dages, 2003; Scholarios, Lockyer and Johnson, 2003). Morrison (1993a) also noted that in order to generalise the results, it is important to investigate newcomer information seeking across organisational contexts. The present study therefore explores differences in the use of sources and strategies for information seeking among three diverse groups of

workers: junior managers in a postal and telecom company, professionals working in an organisation specialising in information technology, and rank-and-file employees working at a holiday resort. This is of interest because differential use of information seeking may result in different ways and/or different degrees of integration and career development in an organisation. Baruch (2004) stated that the entry stage has a strong impact on further career advancement and progress in the organisation.

### The Effect of Information Seeking on Organisational Knowledge and Commitment

A final contribution of the present study is that it includes both organisational knowledge and commitment as indicators of integration in the organisation. A review of organisational socialisation by Bauer, Morrison and Callister (1998) notes that most studies only include attitudinal outcome measures, such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment, as indicators of integration in an organisation (see also e.g. Cooper-Thomas and Anderson, 2002). By relying solely on these types of outcomes, the studies imply that socialisation is characterised by how adjusted newcomers *feel* they are. However, it is also important to examine the effect of information seeking on the *actual* amount of knowledge acquired on various aspects of the organisation: performance proficiency, goals/values, people, history, politics, and its language (Chao et al., 1994). Therefore, the present study examines the effect of information seeking not only on commonly used socialisation outcome variables, such as affective organisational commitment (Meyer, 1998; Rhoades, Eisenberger and Armeli, 2001), but also on the actual knowledge of various organisational domains.

Moreover, not much is known about the effect on these socialisation outcomes of using the various sources and strategies. It may be that integration into an organisation is enhanced if employees more frequently use direct communication with co-workers and supervisors. Finkelstein et al. (2003) found that the use of covert information

seeking led to relatively low levels of role clarity and job satisfaction. The studies by Louis, Posner, and Powell (1983) and Morrison (1993a, 1993b, and 1995) showed that newcomers often directly approached their supervisors and experienced co-workers with questions. A major reason for this may be that newcomers generally communicate with sources who possess the required information, are accessible, are willing to share the information, and who give an accurate representation of the information (DeWhirst, 1971; Miller and Jablin, 1991). Based on this, we would expect that:

*Hypothesis 3a:* Asking supervisors and experienced co-workers for information is most strongly related to organisational knowledge and commitment.

Moreover, since observing entails the risk of misinterpretation (Ashford and Cummings, 1983; Miller and Jablin, 1991), we would expect observing to be less strongly related to organisational knowledge and commitment

*Hypothesis 3b:* Observing is less strongly related to organisational knowledge and commitment.

Finally, the use of written material may be the least productive and useful strategy because it lacks face-to-face communication and because the information sought is often not written down but forms part of the unwritten knowledge of an organisation. Therefore, we would expect:

*Hypothesis 3c:* Written material is the least strongly related to organisational knowledge and commitment.

## METHOD

### Sample

Between June 1997 and April 1998, 560 newcomers in three organisations were sent a written questionnaire and asked to participate in this study (Arbeits, 2002). They were informed that they would receive a second questionnaire eight months later. The choice for this time interval was based on earlier research suggesting that this was a meaningful interval in the socialisation process (see Morrison, 1993a). The response rate was 64% ( $N = 361$ ) at time 1; and, of these, 57% ( $N = 207$ ) responded a second time. These are

acceptable response rates according to Baruch (1999). Only the information on the 207 people who completed both questionnaires is used in the further analysis.

At time 1, the average job tenure was two months ( $SD = 1.4$ ) and the average work experience was five years ( $SD = 3.1$ ). Fifty-seven per cent of the respondents were male. The mean age was 29 years ( $SD = 7.9$ ).

The three organisations were selected because they differed markedly with respect to the type and rank of the jobs of the newcomers, and therefore potentially in the way that the newcomers would seek information. The total sample was made up of: (1) rank-and-file employees working in a holiday resort ( $N = 89$ ); (2) junior managers with a postal and telecom company ( $N = 67$ ); and (3) professionals in an organisation specialising in information technology ( $N = 51$ ). The three samples did not differ significantly in age, but they did differ with respect to gender and level of education. The rank-and-file group had the highest percentage of women, and the IT professional group the lowest. The rank-and-file employees, unsurprisingly, in general had lower levels of education than the professionals and the junior managers. These two demographic variables (gender and education level) were controlled for in the analyses.

To check whether there were differences between respondents who participated at time 1 only and those who completed both questionnaires, multivariate analyses of variance and subsequent t-tests for the total group, and for each sub-group separately, were performed on the variables used in the study. The (M)ANOVA results showed that, for the junior managers and the rank-and-file employees, the respondents who participated only at time 1 did differ significantly from those respondents who participated at both times. Results of the subsequent t-tests indicated that rank-and-file respondents and junior managers who participated at time 1 only had slightly lower scores on affective organisational commitment and organisational knowledge of company history and language than those respondents who participated twice. This should not be overlooked when interpreting the results.

## Measures

The variables were measured through the questionnaire using established multi-item scales. The conventional scale items were translated into Dutch by the authors. In order to check that the Dutch terms had the same meaning as the original English ones, we employed back-translation using an English colleague to translate the Dutch terms back into English, and then compared his terms with the original expressions. Following this, a few minor adjustments were made.

*Information Seeking.* Information seeking was measured at time 1 and time 2 using a Dutch translation of Morrison's (1993a, 1993b) ten items. Six items assessed the frequency with which newcomers asked six different sources for information about expected attitudes and behaviour in the organisation: the immediate supervisor, another indirect supervisor, another newcomer, an experienced colleague, a person outside the organisation such as clients, friends, and family, and a person in a support function. Answers were given using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = never to 5 = very often. Although in Morrison's study the inquiry items were combined into one factor, in the present study these six items were used separately since an explicit objective of this study was to examine differences between the various sources addressed in search of information. Table 2 shows that the correlation coefficients between the six items are positive but not excessively so, ranging from 0.05 (not significant (ns)) for the relationship between approaching experienced co-workers and support staff for information to 0.48 ( $p < 0.001$ ) for the relationship between approaching immediate supervisors and indirect supervisors for information. One item was used to measure the frequency of consulting written material. The use made of observation was measured using three items that probed how often the respondents observed their environment to find out about expected attitudes and behaviour. An example item is "Observing what behaviour is rewarded in the organisation and using this as a cue to what is desirable or expected". Reliability analyses were performed for

the three observation items, for each group of workers, at time 1 and time 2. The alpha coefficients were sufficiently high, except for the junior managers at time 2 ( $\alpha = 0.57$ ).

### *Organisational Knowledge*

*Domains.* To assess the newcomer's knowledge of the organisation, a Dutch translation of Chao et al.'s (1994) instrument was used. The authors developed 34 items to measure the following six knowledge domains: performance proficiency, history, language, organisational goals/values, politics, and people. All answers were scored on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 = I strongly disagree, to 5 = I strongly agree. We performed reliability analyses and, on the basis of this, we decided to delete the least reliable items in the present study. Although we acknowledge that in many ways it would be better to use the full list so that one can compare the results of this study with the results of previous studies, we preferred using incomplete but reliable scales rather than complete but unreliable scales. Therefore, we deleted four items that coincidentally also had high cross-loadings of  $>0.40$  in Chao et al.'s study. These items were: "I would be a good representative of my organisation"; "I believe that I fit in well with my organisation"; "I understand the goals of my organisation"; and "I have not yet learned 'the ropes' of my job." We performed a factor analysis on the resulting items using varimax rotation. This analysis resulted in six factors that were consistent with the six knowledge domains and explained 62% of the variance. In addition, Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.64 to 0.82 at time 1, and from 0.68 to 0.81 at time 2, indicating sufficient reliability in the sub-scales. The only exception was the People knowledge domain, which was consequently excluded from the present study.

### *Affective Organisational*

*Commitment.* Affective organisational commitment was measured using the instrument developed by Allen and Meyer (1990, 1996; Meyer, Allen and Smith, 1993). This instrument consists of five items. Answers are given on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 = I strongly disagree to 5 = I strongly agree. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the total group and the three sub-groups



ranged from 0.81 to 0.84 at time 1, and from 0.76 to 0.88 at time 2, indicating that the scales were sufficiently reliable.

## RESULTS

In order to test the hypotheses, various analyses were performed (cf. Van der Velde and Feij, 1995). Firstly, the differences in the mean scores for all the variables among the three groups at time 1 and time 2 were tested using multivariate analyses of covariance. In these (M)ANOVAs, two demographic variables, gender and level of education, were included as covariates (see Method section). Results show that the groups differed significantly in the mean scores at both time 1 ( $F(8, 198) = 6.54, p < 0.001$ ) and at time 2 ( $F(8, 199) = 5.54, p < 0.001$ ). The results of these analyses are presented in Table 1. This table also includes the results of paired t-tests analysing changes in the mean scores over time for the three groups. Correlation coefficients are also shown for all the variables between time 1 and time 2 for the three groups.

### The Use of Various Sources and Strategies in Information Seeking

Table 1 shows that, of the various strategies, the junior managers most often approached their experienced co-workers and their direct supervisors, both at time 1 and time 2. Rank-and-file newcomers also favoured approaching experienced co-workers over the other options, both at time 1 and time 2. IT professionals would most often ask their supervisors, experienced colleagues, and individuals in support functions for information at both times.

Thus, hypotheses 1a and 1b, which state that, in general, newcomers more often ask supervisors and experienced co-workers for information than use observation, are supported for all three groups.

In addition, hypotheses 1c to 1e, stating that newcomers more often observe than seek information from other newcomers, support staff, or people outside the organisation, are supported by the junior manager and rank-and-file employee groups. These hypotheses are, however, rejected for the IT professionals. For this group, the mean scores on observing were lower

than on asking support staff and other newcomers for information. In the next section, these differences in information seeking between the worker groups are examined more closely.

### Differences in Information Seeking and Socialisation Outcomes between the three groups

The univariate analyses of variance presented in Table 1 show that, both at time 1 and at time 2, the three groups differ significantly in terms of all the information seeking variables, with the exception of asking other newcomers for information. It appears that junior managers approach their immediate and indirect supervisors more often than the rank-and-file and IT professional newcomers do. Furthermore, the table shows that the IT professionals score significantly lower on the observation criterion, both at time 1 and time 2, than do the junior managers and the rank-and-file employees. The IT professionals also score lower than the other two groups when it comes to asking co-workers for information. The IT Professionals score highest on addressing support staff, and the junior managers score higher than the other groups on seeking information from persons outside the organisation.

Finally, the results in the table show that the IT professionals differed significantly from the junior managers and the rank-and-file employees with respect to all the socialisation outcomes, both at time 1 and time 2. The IT professionals generally have less knowledge of their organisation and are less committed to it. The junior managers and the rank-and-file newcomers have similar attitudes to each other in terms of organisational knowledge and commitment.

### Changes in Sources and Strategies of Information Seeking in Time

Correlation coefficients of all the variables between time 1 and time 2 ( $r$ ), and paired t-test results ( $t$ ), were also calculated and included in Table 1. These show that for the manager group all but one of the correlation coefficients were significant. The coefficients ranged from 0.15 (ns) for asking an experienced co-worker for information,

to 0.66 ( $p < 0.001$ ) for observing. For the rank-and-file newcomers, five of the eight coefficients were significant. The coefficients ranged from 0.13 (ns) for asking support staff for information at time 1 and time 2, to 0.49 ( $p < 0.001$ ) for consulting written material. For the IT professionals, six of the eight correlation coefficients were significant – ranging from 0.09 (ns) for asking another newcomer for information at time 1 and time 2, to 0.56 ( $p < 0.001$ ) for observing. However, the correlation coefficients only show whether the relative scores of the respondents are stable over time, it is still possible that the mean scores have increased or decreased. This can be examined using paired t-tests. The results of these tests show that for some of the information seeking variables, the individual groups show a significant change in mean scores over time. For the junior managers, four of the eight mean scores had changed. At time 2, compared with at time 1, they more often asked people outside the organisation for information and individuals in support functions less often, they observed more often, and they consulted written material less often. For the rank-and-file employees, three mean scores had changed. Over time, the frequencies of asking people outside the organisation, consulting written material, and observing increased. The frequency of only one variable in information seeking changed with the IT professionals: they increased their frequency of asking people outside the organisation for information over time.

The results thus show support for hypotheses 2a and 2b: that, over time, the use made of observing and consulting written material increases. Hypotheses 2c and 2d, stating that asking questions to supervisors and experienced co-workers for information decreases over time, were, however, not supported.

With respect to changes in the socialisation outcomes, the organisational knowledge domains and organisational commitment, all the time 1 and time 2 correlation coefficients, for all the groups, were significant. Furthermore, the paired t-tests show that the junior managers made the largest number of positive changes:

Table 1.

Results of Paired t-tests, Correlation Coefficients, and ANOVAs.  
Differences in and between the three groups in mean scores for information seeking, organisational knowledge domains, and organisational commitment at Time 1 and Time 2 (standard deviations are given in parentheses)

Information seeking	Managers (N=67)				Rank-and-file (N=89)				Professionals (N=51)				Total (N=207)				
	M (Sd)	T1	M (Sd)	T2	r	M (Sd)	T1	M (Sd)	T2	t	r	M (Sd)	T1	M (Sd)	T2	F T1	F T2
Asking immediate supervisor	3.90 (0.86)	4.09 (0.90)	-1.61	0.37	**	3.11 (1.31)	3.22 (1.40)	-0.64	0.35	**	3.10 (0.98)	+3.22 (1.19)	-0.66	0.32	*	24.66 ***	12.34 ***
Asking indirect supervisor	3.43 (1.13)	3.45 (1.33)	-0.10	0.54	***	1.91 (1.14)	2.18 (1.28)	-1.77	0.33	**	2.71 (0.97)	2.76 (1.27)	-0.30	0.25		52.47 ***	18.40 ***
Asking another newcomer	3.01 (1.37)	3.19 (1.37)	-0.98	0.40	**	3.15 (1.31)	3.17 (1.27)	-0.13	0.16		2.88 (1.26)	2.90 (1.33)	-0.08	0.09		1.29	.80
Asking experienced co-worker	4.19 (0.93)	4.22 (0.98)	-0.20	0.15		4.44 (0.81)	4.48 (0.86)	-0.29	0.15		3.02 (1.21)	3.33 (1.38)	-1.53	0.37	**	54.26 ***	19.29 ***
Asking outside of the firm	2.52 (1.25)	3.15 (1.33)	-3.84	0.46	***	2.07 (1.28)	2.43 (1.33)	-2.19	0.29	**	2.35 (1.23)	2.76 (1.32)	-2.30	0.53	***	7.84 ***	5.86 **
Asking support staff	3.09 (1.07)	2.73 (1.04)	2.39	0.32	**	2.50 (1.12)	2.45 (1.23)	0.28	0.13		3.22 (1.02)	3.22 (1.11)	0.00	0.39	**	14.64 ***	6.78 **
Observing	3.58 (0.85)	3.74 (0.66)	-2.03	0.66	***	3.62 (0.93)	3.93 (0.78)	-2.78	0.24	*	2.79 (0.94)	2.91 (0.97)	-0.97	0.56	***	40.20 ***	27.38 ***
Consulting written material	3.59 (1.10)	3.17 (1.14)	2.78	0.39	**	2.81 (1.35)	3.41 (1.25)	-4.32	0.49	***	2.78 (1.07)	2.80 (1.26)	-0.11	0.34	*	6.70 **	3.98 *
Knowledge of Performance History	4.02 (0.53)	4.22 (0.46)	-3.45	0.55	***	4.48 (0.54)	4.40 (0.54)	1.27	0.45	***	3.84 (0.63)	3.98 (0.69)	-2.08	0.71	***	30.67 ***	9.04 ***
Language	3.55 (0.59)	3.81 (0.53)	-4.72	0.67	***	3.80 (0.74)	3.85 (0.68)	-0.70	0.49	***	2.77 (0.65)	2.91 (0.66)	-1.38	0.35	**	74.96 ***	39.09 ***
Goals and values	3.83 (0.61)	4.24 (0.54)	-5.52	0.43	***	3.69 (0.71)	3.98 (0.68)	-3.62	0.42	***	3.38 (0.61)	3.67 (0.65)	-3.00	0.41	**	17.30 ***	11.76 ***
Politics	3.72 (0.61)	3.70 (0.62)	0.30	0.60	***	3.89 (0.81)	3.76 (0.77)	1.62	0.53	***	3.40 (0.69)	3.11 (0.71)	3.35	0.61	***	22.09 ***	16.03 ***
Affective commitment	3.59 (0.65)	3.83 (0.58)	-3.20	0.52	***	3.38 (0.79)	3.53 (0.79)	-2.00	0.58	***	3.07 (0.64)	3.06 (0.73)	0.05	0.37	**	23.27 ***	16.54 ***
	3.78 (0.66)	3.72 (0.70)	0.84	0.64	***	3.70 (0.73)	3.75 (0.74)	-0.58	0.52	***	3.23 (0.72)	2.77 (0.89)	4.39	0.59	***	38.27 ***	30.50 ***

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 2.  
Correlation Coefficients between Information Seeking at Time 1, and Organisational Knowledge Domains and Affective Organisational Commitment at Time 2 (N=207).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Asking immediate supervisor	--	0.48***	0.21**	0.23***	0.17*	0.25***	0.39***	0.36***	0.14*	0.12	0.28***	0.04	0.21**	0.06
2. Asking indirect supervisor	--	--	0.18**	0.06	0.25***	0.38***	0.24***	0.39***	0.02	0.03	0.23**	0.05	0.25***	0.03
3. Asking another newcomer	--	--	--	0.21**	0.21**	0.12	0.28***	0.06	0.07	0.16*	0.01	0.06	0.15*	0.09
4. Experienced co-worker	--	--	--	--	0.08	0.05	0.52***	0.19**	0.21**	0.33***	0.11	0.18**	0.26***	0.24**
5. Asking outside of the firm	--	--	--	--	--	0.15*	0.15*	0.12	-0.06	-0.05	0.07	-0.01	0.10	-0.04
6. Asking support staff	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.16*	0.42***	-0.08	-0.01	-0.05	-0.05	0.12	-0.01
7. Observing	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.34***	0.27***	0.32***	0.26***	0.17*	0.28***	0.20**
8. Consulting written material	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.05	0.18**	0.24***	0.17*	0.26***	0.20**
9. Performance knowledge	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.42***	0.51***	0.53***	0.36***	0.34***
10. History knowledge	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.56***	0.40***	0.64***	0.47***
11. Language knowledge	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.43***	0.53***	0.34***
12. Goals and values knowledge	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.33***	0.63***
13. Politics knowledge	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.36***
14. Affective commitment	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

four of the six mean scores increase significantly over time showing increased knowledge of performance, of history, of language, and of politics. The rank-and-file employees show significant positive changes in two socialisation outcomes: over time, they increased their knowledge of the company's language and politics. The IT professionals similarly increase their knowledge of performance and of language. However, their knowledge of the goals and values of the organisation and their affective organisational commitment decreased significantly over time.

### The Effect of Information Seeking on Organisational Knowledge and Commitment

To test hypotheses 3a to 3c, stating that asking supervisors and experienced co-workers for information is most strongly related to organisational knowledge and commitment, observing is less strongly related and the use of written material is the least strongly related to knowledge and commitment, correlation coefficients were first computed between the information seeking variables at time 1 and time 2, and the organisational knowledge and affective organisational commitment variables at time 1 and time 2 for the total group. In Table 2, only the coefficients between information seeking at time 1, and knowledge and commitment at time 2 are presented since similar patterns in the correlation coefficients were found at time 1 and at time 2 and also between the two time periods.

Table 2 shows that observing, asking experienced co-workers for information, and consulting written material, are the seeking options most often significantly related to organisational knowledge and commitment.

As the next step in the analysis, hierarchical regression analyses were also performed for each socialisation outcome. The variables were introduced in two steps. Firstly, the two demographic variables, gender and level of education, were included in the regression equation. Secondly, all the time 1 information seeking variables were entered into the equation. Table 3 presents the results of the regression analyses.

The table shows that, in the first step of the analysis, the demographic variables explain a significant amount of the variance in the knowledge domain of performance proficiency. The level of education appears to have a negative effect on this knowledge domain.

Furthermore, the information seeking variables entered in the next step of the analysis explain a significant additional proportion of the variance in four out of the five knowledge domains (performance, history, language, and politics) and also in affective organisational commitment. The beta coefficients show that observing and consulting written material has a positive effect on two out of the six socialisation outcomes. More specifically, knowledge of performance and knowledge of organisational language are positively affected by observing, and knowledge of organisational goals and values, and affective organisational commitment are positively affected by consulting written material. In addition, asking supervisors and experienced co-workers for information has a positive effect on knowledge of organisational language and knowledge of organisational history. Finally, asking support staff for information has a negative effect on knowledge of organisational language.

These results do not support hypotheses 3a to 3c: that asking supervisors and experienced co-workers for information would be most strongly related to organisational knowledge and commitment. Surprisingly, in contrast to our expectations, the results show that observing and consulting written material are the most strongly related mechanisms to the socialisation outcomes.

Finally, the total proportion of the variance explained by the various factors varies from 5% ( $p < 0.05$ ) for organisational goals to 14% ( $p < 0.001$ ) for organisational language. These proportions are in line with the results of Morrison (1993a).

### CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In the present study, we have analysed the longitudinal effect of vari-

ous sources and strategies in information seeking on the socialisation outcomes in three different situations. This has produced some interesting results.

The first set of hypotheses, stating that newcomers generally seek information from supervisors and experienced co-workers rather than from observing others, and that newcomers more often observe than ask other newcomers, support staff, or clients, family, and friends for information, was generally supported by the results. Thus, while earlier studies had indicated that individuals usually prefer to observe other people than ask outright (Ashford, 1986; Morrison, 1993b), the present findings show that it is important to distinguish between different information sources when comparing observation with direct communication.

Next, our findings show that it is also important to distinguish between various situations and type of worker. For example, we found that the junior managers in a postal and telecoms organisation more often asked their supervisors for information than did the rank-and-file employees working in a holiday resort and IT professionals. Social comparison theory may help to explain this finding. This holds that people compare themselves to people similar to them. Junior managers are thus more likely to compare themselves with their supervisors than is the case with workers in the other groups we considered because, in career terms, the supervisors are frequently only a few years senior to the junior managers. Gathering information from supervisors may therefore imply higher social costs for the other groups than for the junior managers. It is also plausible that the junior manager's supervisor's view of the organisation will be similar to his or her own, and that the junior managers will therefore approach the supervisor more often (Louis, 1990). Also, Baruch (2004) noted that for managers social networking is more relevant compared to rank-and-file employees. Further, we found that the IT professionals observe less, and approach experienced co-workers less often for information, and rely more on persons outside the organisation such as clients, family, and support staff, than do the rank-and-file and managerial newcomers. A possible



Table 3.

## Two-Step Hierarchical Regression Analysis.

## Organisational Knowledge Domains and Affective Organisational Commitment at Time 2

predicted from Background Variables and Sources and Strategies of Information Seeking at Time 1

(N = 207)

Independent variables	Knowledge of Performance		Knowledge of Organisational History		Knowledge of Organisational Language	
	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
<i>Step 1</i>						
Gender (male)	0.00		-0.04		0.05	
Education	-0.23**	0.05**	-0.09	0.03	0.08	0.02
<i>Step 2</i>						
Asking supervisor	0.10		0.00		0.20*	
Asking indirect supervisor	0.05		0.01		0.09	
Asking another newcomer	0.01		0.10		-0.06	
Asking experienced co-worker	0.11		0.17*		-0.02	
Asking outside the organisation	-0.02		-0.06		0.00	
Asking support staff	-0.09		-0.06		-0.23**	
Observing	0.19*		0.13		0.19*	
Consulting written material	-0.01	0.10**	0.14	0.12**	0.12	0.17***
Total Adj. R <sup>2</sup>		0.11**		0.10**		0.14***
Independent variables	Knowledge of Organisational Goals and Values		Knowledge of Organisational Politics		Affective Organisational Commitment	
	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
<i>Step 1</i>						
Gender (male)	0.01		0.07		-0.03	
Education	-0.20*	0.02	0.05	0.02	-0.18*	0.03
<i>Step 2</i>						
Asking supervisor	-0.03		0.03		-0.03	
Asking indirect supervisor	0.12		0.14		0.07	
Asking another newcomer	0.00		0.07		0.04	
Asking experienced co-worker	0.11		0.14		0.14	
Asking outside the organisation	-0.01		0.00		-0.05	
Asking support staff	-0.13		-0.03		-0.08	
Observing	0.05		0.08		0.04	
Consulting written material	0.18*	0.07	0.13	0.12**	0.22*	0.09*
Total Adj. R <sup>2</sup>		0.05*		0.09**		0.07*
<u>Note:</u> * $p < 0.05$ ; ** $p < 0.01$ ; *** $p < 0.001$						

explanation is that their type of job restricts their access to some sources of information. IT professionals usually work on assignments at a client's organisation and therefore have less opportunity to turn to organisational members with questions than the other two groups considered who generally have a fixed workplace alongside their colleagues. Moreover, this remote working by the IT professionals will limit their observation opportunities.

Furthermore, our hypotheses that the use of observation and consulting written material will increase over time, and that of seeking information from supervisors and experienced co-workers would decrease were supported. Most newcomers increased their use of observation over time, and ask persons outside the organisation, such as friends, family, and clients, more frequently for information. This finding supports the assertion of Ashford (1986) that, as tenure increases, the social costs associated with information seeking are greater. Another explanation for our finding could be the growing importance nowadays placed on clients by organisations. An increasing number of organisations expect their employees to value and take into account their clients' opinions of the services they provide or the products they deliver.

The hypotheses with respect to the effect of information seeking on socialisation outcomes were not confirmed. Although, as we expected, asking supervisors and co-workers for information were more strongly related to organisational knowledge and commitment than approaching support staff and organisational outsiders, it appeared that observing and consulting written material were even more strongly related to the socialisation outcomes. The unexpected finding that using written material is strongly related to socialisation outcomes could be explained by the fact that newcomers who use this strategy are highly motivated to integrate into the organisation. The use of written material may be an indication of conscientiousness on the part of newcomers, which has been found related to effectiveness in earlier studies. Future studies could focus on the personal characteristics of newcom-

ers that might have a determining effect on the career choice (Baruch, 2004) and on the use of sources and strategies in information seeking (see e.g., Brown, Ganesan and Challagalla, 2001; Saks and Ashforth, 2000; Wanberg and Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). For example, it is conceivable that nonconformists and creative people will more often directly communicate in their search for information than would conformists and less creative people who may prefer to observe and consult written material, and who may be also more committed to the organisation. Previous studies have also shown that conformists tend to be more strongly committed to an organisation than nonconformists (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979).

#### Limitations of the Present Study and Implications for Future Studies and Organisational Practice

There are some limitations attached to this study that should not be overlooked. Firstly, it should be noted that some of the results of the present study may be affected by non-random sample attrition among the junior managers and rank-and-file newcomers (see Method section). The respondents from these two groups who participated only at time 1 scored slightly lower on affective organisational commitment and on organisational knowledge of history and language than those respondents who participated at both times. Among the IT professionals there were no significant differences between these two groups. This may be the reason that especially the junior managers, but also the rank-and-file newcomers, significantly increased their average score on knowledge of history and language over time. However, over time they also scored higher on the other domains of organisational knowledge for which there were no significant differences between the time 1 only group and the time 1 plus time 2 group. Moreover, it is surprising that knowledge of organisational goals and values and the affective organisational commitment of the IT professionals decreased significantly over time.

A second limitation is that this study focused on three occupational groups in three different organisations. Future studies should focus on differ-

ences between occupational groups within the same organisation in order to determine whether differences in information seeking and socialisation tendencies are caused primarily by differences in the type and rank of work, or by the organisation (see e.g. Klein and Weaver, 2000) and its culture.

Thirdly, the study included only data reported by the employees themselves (through a questionnaire). Future studies should include more objective data collection, such as the actual development of the career, or data from other sources such as supervisors and other colleagues to assess the organisational knowledge of the employees. This would increase the multi-method validity of the results on the effect of information seeking on organisational socialisation.

We recommend that future studies also pay attention to the motivation of newcomers in using the various strategies and sources for information seeking. For example, why do newcomers address their colleagues and supervisors directly, in preference to observing them, and why is there an increase in the use of observation over time? These aspects were not examined in the present study.

Despite these limitations, the present study clearly shows that it is important to distinguish between the various sources in asking for information if one is researching the use and effect of information seeking on socialisation. Moreover, it is important to distinguish between the type of newcomer and/or organisation in the process of information seeking. Further, we have found that differences in using the various sources and strategies in information seeking clearly lead to differences in important socialisation outcomes, such as organisational knowledge and commitment. For example, the IT professionals who made less use of observation and asking their colleagues for information than did the junior managers and rank-and-file newcomers, and who relied more on organisational outsiders for information, score significantly lower on organisational knowledge than the other two groups. Moreover, the IT professionals' commitment and socialisation even decreased over time.

In terms of organisational practice, the results indicate that it is important to stimulate direct contact (asking questions) as well as indirect contact (observation) between co-workers because these methods of information seeking appear to have a significant positive relation with the socialisation outcomes of newcomers. Special attention should be given to newcomers who mainly work outside the organisation itself, such as in clients' organisations, since they have limited opportunities to gather information from organisational members. Consequently, they have less knowledge of the various domains of the organisation and are less committed to it. Organisations that employ professionals who work outside the organisation itself could make use of mentors, actively stimulate frequent informal contacts between colleagues, and offer in-house training in order to compensate for the lack of opportunities to observe and ask organisational members for information about how to behave and act in the organisation, since this has been shown to be a very important factor in socialisation within an organisation.

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